

Aretino at home

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The artistic project Aretino pursued throughout his life was as much about his works as on his person, aspects that already at an early stage in his career became intrinsically intertwined. Heavily imbued by a quest for status characteristic of the men of letters that in late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Italy came to positions of considerable influence in the quickly expanding institutional bodies governing both courts and republics, Aretino found himself constrained to explore alternative pathways to such status when in 1525 at the age of 33 his rocketlike career in the papal court came to an unexpected and harsh end. His intuition to turn this critical situation into a blessing in disguise, ‘inventing’ himself as man of letters at the service of no one but himself and thus overturning the conventional power structure in courtly cultures, responded as much to his personal inclinations as to the transformative logic of satire, the genre that in Rome had secured him fame and a position of prominence. But as is the case in most instances informed by satire, the new artistic, intellectual and social persona developed by Aretino in his late thirties and early forties remained intrinsically linked to the templates it provocatively contested and undermined.

This chapter wants to elucidate this delicate balance between convention and invention – a central topic in Aretino scholarship over many years – with regard to the element in the author’s artistic project that doubtless is the most innovative: the foregrounding of his personality as part of a strategy to gain and maintain authority. Once established in Venice as an independent intellectual, in his quest for recognition as a man of letters able to be influential also at a political level Aretino clearly needed to resort to strategies that included but also went beyond the ones employed in courtly settings. So besides continuing to write texts targeted at an ever increasing variety of potential patrons, he resolved to exploit his artistic prowess and insight – talents widely appreciated all along his career – to present himself as a man of rare judgment and good taste, able to advise and mediate precisely

because of his independent position and thanks to his imposing multipartisan network of men and women in influential positions all over Europe.

Yet the lasting success of this ‘persona’ Aretino – during the author’s lifetime and well beyond – depended not primarily on the unusual talent in which it rooted but on the well meditated framing of this constructed identity, aptly designed and applied by the protagonist himself, particularly in his letters and therefore in the ambitious endeavour to publish these from 1538 onwards. Crucial in this operation of self-fashioning was its novelty vis-à-vis the conventional men of letters, with respect to their economic and political (in)dependency as much as to their style. It was precisely the apparent distinctiveness that constituted a unique selling point for a man like Aretino, who thus consistently tried to highlight his being different. But the goals he pursued – recognition, authority, status, fame, position, honour – were not that different from what his contemporary peers strived for. Nor were the benchmarks that signaled the extent to which success was reached, and that indeed were a common ground which enabled such peers to mutually understand how successful they were in accomplishing their ambitions.

One of these benchmarks was the material situation in which a man of letters lived and worked: his house. To Aretino this was a matter of special concern, since after his forced departure from the papal court in Rome he could not rely anymore on the stable hospitality of a patron, as his wanderings in the subsequent period, from late 1525 till spring 1527, confirmed. Thus having been able to find stability and comfort quite soon upon his arrival in Venice first and foremost offered the economic security he had longed for, as his words full of relief and some blame sent to his reluctant patron, Federico Gonzaga, attest:

And if you are not inclined to honoustly support me, you can easily see that I have plenty of ways to make a living. Indeed there are only few honourable foreigners here like me: I have a house on the Canal Grande with all comodities, I hold five domestics at my expenses and provide them with food and clothing similar to what I do for myself. Everyday I have three or

four guests at dinner. And consider that Venice is a city where everything is extremely expensive!¹

For the penniless newcomer who Aretino was when in March 1527 he first arrived in Venice it seems quite an accomplishment to reach such a situation of well being within not even three years – the letter to Gonzaga is from April 1530. Perhaps too much of an accomplishment, if we don't take his words for granted and consider them instead one of the first specimens of a self-fashioning rhetoric aimed at accentuating the independence the author by then had gained, not without provocation towards a prince who had denied him his patronage. In such rhetoric the material living situation becomes a trope that allows and indeed invites some exaggeration. As such this early passage illustrates what this chapter will investigate in some more detail: the rhetorical use of 'Aretino at home' scenes and episodes in the author's self-fashioning strategies, juxtaposed to what documentary evidence we have on these domestic situations, and considered in the perspective of this discourse's long-term effects. Additionally, the polemical and even antithetical backdrop to this very discourse of distinction also calls for some explorations into the ways both this rhetoric and practice related to the conventional ones overtly contested, in order not only to highlight the differences but also their common ground.

Before Aretino in his late thirties initiated an existence as independent intellectual, he had already gathered quite some experience in presenting himself in the bearings of a provocative and thus

¹ “Et quando non mi vogliate honestamente sovvenire, vedrete ch'ò mille vie da vivere: et così ci sono pochi forestieri onorevoli qui come sono io; tengo casa suso il Canal Grande comodamente guarnita, do il pane a cinque servitori et il vestire a me simile. Et sempre tre o quattro mangiano meco, et sto in Venetia ch'ogni cosa è carissima.” Letter from Venice, dated 20 April 1530, reproduced in: Alessandro Luzio, *Pietro Aretino nei primi suoi anni a Venezia e la corte dei Gonzaga* (Torino, 1888), doc. XXXII, 94-95. Translations by the author, if not otherwise specified.

programmatically ‘different’ man of letters,² a quality much appreciated in the sophisticated courtly circles of early sixteenth-century Rome. His domestic situation, though, never had a special flavour. As a junior member in the household of first Agostino Chigi and later the Medici clan around the pontiffs Leo X and Clement VII he logically enjoyed the hospitality of his patrons, as so many others did who like Aretino had come from outside and did not have a family residence in town. The home of his family in native Arezzo, on the other hand, reflected his humble origins to a point that it was all but omitted from Aretino’s self-fashioning strategies, a circumstance that at a later stage in life gave some of his opponents reason to speculate on it being a place of ill repute.³ It also engendered a long enduring amnesia about the exact location of the building,⁴ a situation which after more than a century of speculation only recently has ended in the evidence based documentation on both Aretino’s family

² Characteristically, and programmatically, he coined his first work *Opera nova*, written in his formative years in Perugia and published in 1512 by the Venetian house of Niccolò Zoppino.

³ Such accusations drew on the polemical verses against Aretino written by Francesco Berni in the late 1520s, particularly his poem “Contra Pietro Aretino” with these verses on the author’s sisters: “[...] those two ladies you hold in your Arezzo bordello to your great honour, raising their legs while asking: ‘What are you doing my love?’” (“[...] quelle due, sciagurato, c’hai nel bordel d’Arezzo a grand’onore, a gambettar: ‘Che fa lo mio amore?’”). Scandalous stories like these would become highly influential in establishing Aretino’s posthumous reputation; on this aspect of his reception see Harald Hendrix, “La funzione della morte leggendaria nella mitografia di Pietro Aretino”, in *Pietro Aretino nel Cinquecentenario della nascita*, ed. Enrico Malato (Roma, 1995), vol. I, 453-469.

⁴ Only in the nineteenth century speculations on its location started, alongside discussions on the house of Petrarch in Arezzo; cfr. Antonio Bacci, “La casa natale del Petrarca: storia di una *querelle* ancora aperta”, in *Petrarca e l’identità aretina fra Otto e Novecento*, ed. Luca Berti (Arezzo, 2009), 45-71. This first produced the hypothesis that the house presently located in Via XX Settembre 37 had been Aretino’s family home, as was accentuated by the positioning of a small bust and an inscription. On this erroneous attribution, cfr. Alessandro Del Vita, “La nascita e la morte di Pietro Aretino”, *Il Vasari*, 18 (1960): 51-61.

and their home, situated at the corner of what in present day Arezzo is the Via Cesalpino and the Via della Fioraia.⁵

Whereas Aretino himself did not regard this house his home after he left it as a youngster around 1508 – never to return – some of his relatives continued to live there well into the 1530s.⁶ Consequently, when in 1525 Aretino got into serious trouble at the papal court, he did not consider taking refuge with his family, but instead used his parental home and native town in a characteristically combined action to save his few treasures and to strengthen at the same time his fame as a local prodigy. Being coerced to leave Rome at short notice, he made sure that some of the most valuable items in his possession were sent to Arezzo. He resolved to donate to the city council his portrait only very recently executed by Sebastiano del Piombo, a generous gift much welcomed and positioned as of its arrival in early 1526 in the council's hall where it has been up till today.⁷

⁵ Documentation on this house in Armando Cherici, *Il 'Libellus de Antiquitate urbis Arretii' di M.A. Alessi. Mito, cultura e storia nell'Arezzo del Cinquecento* (Arezzo, 1989); Teresa d'Alessandro Camaiti, "Documentazione locale su Pietro Aretino", in *In utrumque paratus. Aretino e Arezzo, Aretino a Arezzo: in margine al ritratto di Sebastiano del Piombo*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Roma, 2008), 55-76. At the height of Via Cesalpino 34 now a plaque is installed which reads: "Qui era la casa / dove nel 1492 nacque / Pietro del Buta / passato alla storia col nome / Pietro Aretino. // La brigata aretina amici dei monumenti 1981".

⁶ His mother Margherita (Tita) Bonci, his brother Nicola and sisters Ginevra and Nobile died here in November 1527 during a pest epidemic. From that moment only his biological father Luca di Domenico Gherardi 'il Sordo' survived (died in 1551), as did his official father, husband of Tita, the cobbler Pietro del Tura and his sister Francesca, who continued to live in her parental home until her second marriage to Orazio Vannotti in August 1538. Cfr. D'Alessandro Camaiti, "Documentazione locale", and Paul Larivaille, *Pietro Aretino* (Roma, 1997), 11-25.

⁷ The Sebastiano del Piombo portrait has been meticulously documented and researched; for the most up-to-date overview, cfr. Enrico Parlato, "Pietro Aretino ritratto da Sebastiano del Piombo, 'stupendissimamente' descritto da Giorgio Vasari: metamorfosi delle identità aretiniane", in *In*

Likewise he sent to his family Parmigianino's *Selfportrait in a convex mirror* which shortly before he had received as a gift, most probably from Clement VII to whom the young artist from Parma upon his arrival in 1524 at Rome had offered this brilliant specimen of his pictorial talents.⁸

As a result, in the late 1520s Aretino managed to acquire local fame in his native Arezzo, growing into a figure whose name in official records changed from the earlier Pietro del Buta into Pietro Aretino.⁹ His portrait in the city hall commanded general respect, as did his family home where the Parmigianino selfportrait soon grew into an attraction for visitors, amongst whom the young Vasari who left a well-known testimony of this experience:

Having finished the canvas he donated it to the Pope, who did not react to this gift as he did to the others. Since while he had given the portrait of Our Lady to cardinal Ippolito de' Medici, and the portrait in the mirror to Pietro Aretino who served him as poet, he kept the picture of the

utrumque paratus, 207-225. At a later stage, the Arezzo authorities compensated Aretino for his generous gift by donating him a small Etruscan bronze sculpture defined as a "Leone di bronzo"; cfr. the letter "Al Ricovero" dated December 1553, in Procaccioli, *Lettere VI*, n. 323, 294.

⁸ On the selfportrait, cfr. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, "L'autoritratto del Parmigianino. La consistenza (im)materiale dell'autoritratto di Vienna", in *Parmigianino e il manierismo europea*, ed. Lucia Fornari Schianchi (Milano, 2002), 67-82. Subsequently, the selfportrait came into the collection of Valerio Belli in Vicenza, where it was when in 1546 it passed to his son Elio, who in 1560 through the mediation of Andrea Palladio sold it to Alessandro Vittoria in Venice; cfr. Bertrand Jestaz, "La raccolta di Valerio Belli e il collezionismo veneto contemporaneo", in *Valerio Belli Vicentino (c. 1468-1546)*, eds. Howard Burns, Marco Collareta, and Davide Gasparotto (Vicenza, 2000), 160-167, 445; Vicky Avery, "Alessandro Vittoria collezionista", in *'La bellissima maniera'. Alessandro Vittoria e la scultura veneta del Cinquento* (Trento, 1999), 141-151. Possibly the painting was given to Belli after Aretino's sister had left the Arezzo house by 1538. In Aretino's oeuvre there is no mention of the work.

⁹ D'Alessandro Camaiti, "Documentazione locale", 59.

Circumcision for himself, and later as we gather it passed on to the Emperor. I remember that as a young boy I saw the portrait in the mirror in Arezzo, in the houses of this Pietro Aretino, where foreigners passing through the city used to come in to see and admire it.¹⁰

Even the great and mighty apparently paid their respect to the illustrious son of Arezzo, by saluting his sister in their family home, as did duke Alessandro de' Medici in August 1536, a most honorable episode proudly recorded by Aretino himself:

Hardly my likeness, positioned by the benevolence of the Arezzo citizens in the town hall just above the door of the room where you slept, deserved being watched and being praised for its lifelike qualities by a Prince of Florence, a son-in-law of Emperor Charles, a son of a duke, a

¹⁰ “Il quale quadro finito lo donò al Papa, che non fece di questo come degl'altri; perché avendo donato il quadro di Nostra Donna a Ipolito cardinale de' Medici suo nipote, et il ritratto nello specchio a messer Pietro Aretino poeta e suo servitore, e quello della Circoncisione ritenne per sé, e si stima che poi col tempo l'avesse l'imperatore. Il ritratto dello specchio mi ricordo io, essendo giovinetto, aver veduto in Arezzo nelle case di esso messer Pietro Aretino, dove era veduto dai forestieri che per quella città passavano, come cosa rara.” Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, eds. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Firenze, 1966), vol. IV, 535-536. The comment is present in both the 1550 and 1568 versions of the *Vite*, but the 1550 version gives a slightly different wording, adding that at a later stage Aretino donated the work to Valerio Belli, but without specifying if that occurred from the Arezzo house or from Aretino's home in Venice: “E ne fe' segno tal cosa manifesto il mandarlo a Clemente VII pontefice, ch'egli nel vederlo con ogni ingegnoso se ne stupì, et ordinò di sue bocca ch'egli da Parma venisse a Roma; e di tal cosa in dono ne fe' degno messer Pietro Aretino, il quale in Arezzo nelle sue case un tempo come reliquia il tenne, e poi lo donò a Valerio Vicentino”. Vasari likewise gives a most laudatory description of the Aretino portrait by Sebastiano del Piombo, and testifies to it being a gift from Aretino to his home town; cfr. Parlato, “Pietro Aretino ritratto”, 209, 219.

cousin of two pontiffs. And even more so, to torment me with the sweetnesses of obligations, your highness decided to stop in front of the house where I was born, curtsying to my sister with the reverence she ought to have used curtsying to you.¹¹

Yet also this tribute needs to be considered with some caution, since besides his own testimony there is no evidence to support Aretino's version of this exceptional event, which surely might have drawn the attention of a wider circle of reporters.¹² Perhaps Aretino was inspired by the well-known precedent of that other exile from Arezzo, Petrarch, who during a visit in 1350 had been welcomed with great honors, at which occasion his family home – situated close to the Aretino house – was shown to him as it was carefully maintained by the local administration, an episode known only from the report given two decades later by Petrarch himself.¹³ Likewise Aretino welcomed and enjoyed

¹¹ “Non meritava l’effigie mia, posta da la benignità de gli Aretini in palazzo sopra l’uscio de la camera dove dormiste, che un Principe di Fiorenza, un genero di Carlo Imperadore, un nato di Duca, un nipote di due Pontefici, la guardasse, e guardando la dipinta, desse tante lodi a la viva. E per più accorarmi con la dolcezza de l’obligazione, fermossi la vostra alta persona dinanzi a la casa dove io nacqui, inchinandosi a la sorella mia con la riverenza con cui ella doveva inchinarvisi.” Letter “Al Duca di Firenze” dated 18 December 1536, published after Alessandro De Medici’s death (January 1537) in Aretino’s first epistolary collection produced in January 1538; Procaccioli, *Lettere I*, n. 82, 142-143.

¹² D’Alessandro Camaiti 2008, “Documentazione locale”, 56, based on extensive research in local documentation relating to the duke’s 1536 visit.

¹³ In a letter to Giovanni (Fei) d’Arezzo dated 9 September 1370; cfr. Francis Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age. Rerum senilium libri I-XVIII*, translation Aldo S. Bernardo, Saul Levin, and Reta A. Bernardo (Baltimore, 1992), vol. II, 483-485: “Let me add to this a story that I hope you will read with no reluctance. In the Jubilee year, as I was returning from Rome and passing through Arezzo, certain noble townsmen of yours, judged me worthy to be escorted by them. Before leading me beyond the city walls, they took me unawares through that street, and to my amazement and ignorance pointed out

being recognised and revered by his fellow townsmen, however without making his hometown nor his birthplace into an element of particular significance in the self-fashioning strategy he resolved to in the late 1520s.¹⁴

Instead soon after his arrival in March 1527 he resolved to make Venice his adoptive home town, linking to his own personality its qualities generally recognised and admired, particularly its freedom and splendour. Not by chance Aretino used the homes he established in the lagoon city as tools to accomplish such a bold transfer of values, which has all the likes of an ideological appropriation instrumental in his quest for status. Nowhere did he more eloquently expose this strategy than in the famous letter to his landlord, included in and most probably written for his first book of *Letters* of 1538, which in many ways represents the mature phase of Aretino's self-fashioning project.

To me, my honoured Lord, it would be sinful ingratitude if I would not pay with praise part of what I owe to the divinity of the site where your house is located. Here I live with a pleasure unsurpassed in my life, since it is situated in a spot that nor here nor there, neither in this direction nor in any other can find any competition. Thus dwelling on its qualities, I fear, is arduous as reflecting on the Emperor's merits. For sure whoever built it founded it on the most dignified part of the Canal Grande. And since this is the Patriarch of all canals, and Venice the Pope of all cities,

the house where I was born, certainly not large or fancy, but befitting an exile. And among other things they said that, to use Livy's words, filled me with more wonder than credence, that at one time the owner of that house had wanted to enlarge it, but was publicly forbidden to do so, lest anything be changed from how it looked when this insignificant little man and great sinner entered this wretched, toilsome life across that threshold. So your townsmen point to it with pride, and Arezzo thus accords to an outsider more than Florence does to her own citizen."

¹⁴ In a letter to Vasari dated April 1549, Aretino reflected on the reasons "why I do not regret being a man from Arezzo" ("perch'io non mi dolgo d'esser di Arezzo"); Procaccioli, *Lettere V*, n. 228, 174-175.

I may truthfully state that while living on the most beautiful street I enjoy the most beautiful view of the world.¹⁵

The “house on the Canal Grande with all comodities” already mentioned in his letter to Federico Gonzaga from April 1530 now has become something like the centre of the universe, thanks to the splendours of Venice amongst which it occupies a privileged position [ILL 1]. From his home Aretino overviews not only the properties of his illustrious neighbours, but also the incessant activities on the nearby bridges, in the markets, warehouses and boats that fill his horizon with an overwhelming sense of vitality, as he vividly recalls in the remainder of the long and evocative letter. The house itself by all means is a synecdoche for Aretino himself, as one of his more perceptive visitors, the erudite Giulio Camillo, significantly remarked:

And who would not have been peeing his pants seeing on a harsh winter’s day a gondola with Germans keeling over only a few instances after leaving the pub, as I did together with the

¹⁵ “Egli, onorando Gentil’uomo, mi pare peccare ne la ingratitude, se io non pagassi con le lodi una parte di quel che son tenuto a la divinità del sito, dove è fondata la vostra casa, la quale abito con sommo piacere de la mia vita; per ciò che ella è posta in luogo che né ’l più giusto, né ’l più suso, né ’l più qua, né ’l più là ci trova menda. Onde temo, entrando nei suoi meriti, come se teme a entrare in quegli de l’Imperadore. Certo chi la fabricò le diede la perminenza del più degno lato ch’abbia il canal grande. E per esser egli il Patriarca d’ogni altro rio, e Venezia la Papessa d’ogni altra cittade, posso dir con verità ch’io godo de la più bella strada e de la più gioconda veduta del mondo.” The letter dated 27 October 1537 was written in the very period Aretino assiduously worked on the completion of his first collection of *Letters*, and thus may well be considered a text written specifically with that occasion in mind. Procaccioli, *Lettere I*, n. 212, 300-303. The letter follows not long after Aretino's report on the honor bestowed on his Arezzo family home by the duke of Florence, and thus establishes one of the thematic strings in the first book of *Letters* contributing to the forging of Aretino's public persona.

famous Giulio Camillo, whose kindness keeps telling me that the back entrance to this dwelling on the land side, because it is dark, awkward, and has a beastly stairway, resembles the frightfulness of my name acquired by my displaying the truth? Moreover he adds that whoever meets me finds in my pure, straightforward and natural friendship the same easy joy one experiences when entering the portico and taking a view from the balconies I mentioned before.¹⁶

The letter serves to create an image of Aretino by associating his private dwellings, seen as expression of his identity, to its Venetian context, both physically – the rare beauty and splendour of its position – and metaphorically: the city’s wealth, liberty and vitality. As such this home is the ideal residence for a man dominated by an unrelentless urge for independence and truth – “the frightfulness of my name acquired by my displaying the truth”.

So evocative is the letter’s rhetoric that it’s more down-to-earth details tend to remain less noticed. What Aretino describes is not a grandiose palace on the Canal Grande, but a modest apartment – he mentions “my bed, my office, my kitchen, my rooms and my parlor” – situated at the corner of the Rio S. Grisostomo and the Canal Grande, in a neighborhood which had lost its prominence, and in a small family palace owned by the Bolani family that was in constant need of repairs.¹⁷ And as the first line of the letter obliquely suggests, this dwelling had become the object of

¹⁶ “E chi non s’averia pisciato sotto vedendo nel cor del freddo rovesciarsi una barca calcata di Tedeschi pur a l’ora scappati de la taverna, come vedemmo io e il famoso Giulio Camillo, la cui piacevolezza mi suol dire che l’entrata per terra di sì fatta abitazione per essere oscura, mal destra, e di scala bestiale, simiglia a la terribilità del nome acquistatomi ne lo sciorinar del vero? Poi soggiunge che chi mi pratica punto trova ne la mia pura, schietta, e naturale amicizia quella tranquilla contentezza che si sente nel comparir nel portico, e ne l’affacciarsi a i balconi sopradetti.” *Ivi*. Aretino shared this opinion, as he details in a letter from August 1538, on which cfr. *infra*, note 19.

¹⁷ Documentation on this house in: Giuseppe Tassini, “Delle abitazioni in Venezia di Pietro Aretino”, *Archivio veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti*, 31 (1886): 205-208; Alessandro Luzio, *Pietro Aretino nei*

some contention regarding the lease, which in fact Aretino never paid during the more than twenty years he used the house. When in 1529, two years after his arrival in Venice, he moved into the first floor apartment of what only recently had become a property of the Bolani family, the owners apparently did not insist on him paying the moderate rent,¹⁸ perhaps hoping that his presence and reputation might give lustre to their family and advance the careers of the two Bolani sons Domenico and Giacomo.¹⁹

While the 1537 letter on the Ca' Bolani is framed initially as a long overdue thank-you note praising the family's property to compensate for their protracted and possibly involuntary free

primi suoi anni a Venezia e la corte dei Gonzaga (Torino, 1888), 40-47; Ettore Camesasca, "Le alloggiamenti dell'Aretino in Venezia", in Pietro Aretino, *Lettere sull'arte*, eds. Fidenzio Pertile and Ettore Camesasca (Milano, 1957-1960), vol. III-1, 155 ff.; Christopher Cairns, "Ancora sulla casa dell'Aretino sul Canal Grande", *Studi veneziani*, 14 (1972): 211-217; Juergen Schulz, "Houses of Titian, Aretino and Sansovino", in Idem, *Titian, His World and His Legacy*, ed. David Rosand (New York, 1982), 73-118.

¹⁸ In a tax estimate from 1538 the rent was fixed at 28 ducats a year; cfr. Cairns, "Ancora sulla casa dell'Aretino", 216. For his house and garden at Biri Grande, to which he moved in 1531, Titian paid an annual rent of 40 ducats, raised to 50 ducats in 1536 and to 60 ducats in 1549; cfr. Schulz, "Houses", 82.

¹⁹ As suggested in Cairns, "Ancora sulla casa dell'Aretino", 216. On the Bolani sons and their careers, cfr. also Christopher Cairns, "Domenico Bollani, a Distinguished correspondent of Pietro Aretino: some Identifications", *Renaissance News*, 19 (1966): 193-205; Christopher Cairns, *Domenico Bollani Bishop of Brescia. Devotion to Church and State in the Republic of Venice in the Sixteenth Century* (Nieuwkoop, 1976); Gaetano Cozzi, "Domenico Bollani: un vescovo veneziano tra Stato e Chiesa", *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 89 (1977): 562-589. The situation regarding the lease did not change until 1551, when Aretino left the apartment possibly following threats of legal action by his landlords. On his departure, cfr. his letter to the Bolani brothers from January 1551, in Procaccioli, *Lettere VI*, n. 54, 65.

hospitality, its main objective is to proudly announce and demonstrate that Aretino's mission to establish himself as an independent yet influential man of letters had been successfully accomplished, not in a conventional courtly setting but in the much more vibrant urban environment that Venice offered. The vitality, wealth, independence and beauty this macrocosm represents is projected on the microcosm of Aretino's house and persona, that metonymically becomes the centre of this entrepreneurial universe. In another letter from 1538, Aretino programmatically exposes such ideas on an existential relationship between house, person and character: "But who wants to see in what ways one's spirit is clear and transparent just needs to look at one's face and dwellings. My advice is to look at these, and you will see how easy it is to observe the serene and beautiful qualities a person has in his dwelling and in his face".²⁰

But to what extent was this hyperbolic and presumptuous rhetoric grounded in reality? As we know from Juergen Schulz's reconstruction of the apartment's lay-out [ILL 2], it was a "vest-pocket *piano nobile*" in a "patrician palace on a miniature scale" situated in "one of the older quarters of the city, one that had been fashionable in the high Middle Ages but that by this time had declined".²¹ It consisted of a reception room on the Canal Grande, the conventional *portego*, reached by a long corridor connected to the entrance on the landward side (the "beastly stairway" mentioned by Camillo), and had three additional rooms with each two windows facing the Rio di S. Grisostomo, all with separate access.²²

²⁰ "Ma chi vol vedere in che modo il suo animo è netto e candido, miri di lui la fronte e l'abitazioni; e mirile dico, e vedrà quanto di sereno e di vago si può bramare in una abitazione e in una fronte". Letter dated 30 August 1538 "A M. Andrea Udone", in Procaccioli, *Lettere II*, n. 79, 81-82.

²¹ Schulz, "Houses", 84; Schulz also reproduces a modern groundplan of the apartment (*ivi*, 85), however without any documentary reference.

²² In his 1537 letter to Bolani, Aretino mentions: "Neither does the Winter Sun dear to rise without giving motion to my bed, my office, my kitchen, my rooms and my parlor" ("Né il Sol del verno ardisce mai di levarsi, se prima non dà motto al mio letto, al mio studio, a la mia cocina, a le mie camere e a la mia sala". The windows in the apartment have a South-East orientation. Given the fact

Besides its privileged position and view on the Canal Grande, this was not a very grand residence, and Aretino in fact felt coerced to continuously invest in repair works aimed at guaranteeing some more comfort.²³ Yet the apartment perfectly fitted Aretino's project to establish himself as an alternative man of letters, making his home into a place not focused on erudition and tradition, but on real life and experimentation. Only a few days after his letter to Bolani he wrote an equally elaborate epistle, also to be published in the first volume of his correspondence, detailing his gastronomical habits and particularly his preference for salads, thanking his correspondent, the otherwise unknown Girolamo Sarra, for providing his house with the best vegetables to be had.²⁴ The report not only gives an exceptionally vivid impression of the dinner parties hosted by Aretino,²⁵ including passionate debates on food with friends like Titian coming from other regions and thus advocating different gastronomical habits. Even more so, it stresses the protagonist's inclination to present himself as a man of nature, as opposed to the conventional template of the man of letters imbued with erudite culture.

that the apartment was on the humbler first (*soler de mezzà*), not the second and more dignified floor of the building (*soler de sopra*), the windows in the three separate rooms might have suffered from the shades produced by the buildings on the opposite side of the narrow Rio S. Grisostomo. If we nonetheless follow Aretino in his description of the lay-out of his home, the three separate rooms besides the "sala / portego" could have served as office, bedroom and kitchen.

²³ In two additional letters to his landlord, Aretino complains about the poor state of the apartment and mentions some of the repairs he had himself provided for; cfr. the letters dated April 1538 and Januari 1551, in Procaccioli, *Lettere IV*, n. 433, 269; *VI*, n. 54, 65. In the last letter he added that the lease of 60 ducats for his new home more than doubled the value of the apartment in Ca' Bolani, which thus by 1550 had been slightly raised to some 30 ducats.

²⁴ The letter is dated 4 november 1537, cfr. Procaccioli, *Lettere I*, n. 216, 306-308.

²⁵ The letter also specifies the presence of a number of female servants in Aretino's house: "If my lady servants would be able to prepare it the Genovese way ..." ("Se le mie fanti sapessero condirla a la genovese ...").

The rhetorics of domesticity Aretino uses as of the moment in late 1537 he conceives the auto-celebrative project of the *Letters* regards both his private life and persona as well as his public existence as an artist amongst artists, dimensions that remain profoundly entangled along the remaining two decades of his life. In thanking another of his suppliers for sending him a fine stock of truffles in the summer of 1538, he demonstrates his expertise in matters of culinary subtleties as much as his gallantry, since he plans to use them in a meal for a “certain Lady”.²⁶ Clearly this is another lady than his housemaid and mistress Caterina Sandella, who frequently is mentioned with great affection, as are the two daughters she gave him, Adria and Austria.²⁷ The manifold references to his lover and her girls foreground Aretino’s affectionate nature not burdened by conventions as well as his appreciation of the most minute details of daily life, as in this short and most practical note written shortly after the birth of the second daughter Austria and published in the third book of his *Letters*:

I do urge you, Catherine, not to urge me, and request you not to request me, and advise you not to advise me to give Adria to the nurse we had before, nor Adria to the nanny we have now, since one is lacking milk and the other is without good manners. Just leave my two dear

²⁶ “[...] non so che signora”: letter dated 28 augustus 1538 “Al capitan Adrian da Perugia”; Procaccioli, *Lettere* II, n. 77, 79-80.

²⁷ Caterina came into the Aretino household by 1532, and married the male servant Bortolo Sandella; her daughters were born in 1537 (Adria) and 1547 (Austria). At the time of Aretino’s intimate dinner party for the “non so che signora” in the Summer of 1538 Caterina Sandella had temporarily left the house, together with another female servant, Perina Ricci, following accusations of theft; cfr. Pietro Aretino, *Lettere*, ed. Francesco Erspamer (Parma, 1995), vol. I, 217, n. 2. On Sandella and her central position in the Aretino circle, cfr. Lionello Puppi, “Tiziano e Caterina Sandella”, *Venezia Cinquecento. Studi di Storia dell’Arte e della Cultura*, 32 (2006): 133-168.

girls in our home, where at least one will get nourished on caresses and the other may be disciplined by love.²⁸

Aretino's apartment in Ca' Bolani however was much more than simply a family home or the scene of gallant dinner parties. It hosted some of his assistants, notably Niccolò Franco,²⁹ attracted numerous visitors like Giulio Camillo, and became a preferred place for the gatherings of an expanding circle of creative people that from the 1530s onwards used the opportunities vibrant Venice offered to talented ambitious artists interested in exploring new expressive modes. While at such meetings the pleasures of the table were as much an asset to the houselord as the fascinating location of his home, their goal clearly was the debate on art this enjoyable situation facilitated. This is what one of the more elaborate accounts of such a meeting in the Summer of 1540, at the home of Aretino's best friend and companion Titian, suggests:

I was invited on the day of the calends of August to celebrate that sort of Bacchanalian feast which, I know not why, is called *ferrere Agosto* – though there was much disputing about this in the evening – in a pleasant garden belonging to Messer Tiziano Vecellio, an excellent painter as everybody knows, and a person really fitted to season by his courtesies any distinguished entertainment. There were assembled with the said M. Tiziano, as like desires

²⁸ “Io, Catarina, ti prego che non mi preghi, e ti impongo che non mi imponga, e ti consiglio che non mi consigli a dare Austria a balia di prima, né Adria a la maestra di adesso: però che l’una è di latte sterile, e l’altra di costumi mendica. Sì che stiansi le due mie figliuole in casa nostra, che al manco quella sarà nutricata di vezzi, e questa disciplinata d’amore.” Dated December 1547, in Procaccioli, *Lettere IV*, n. 273, 175.

²⁹ Franco stayed in the Aretino house from August 1537 till Autumn 1538, assisting his master in the preparation of the *Letters* enterprise. Their collaboration notoriously ended in bitter enmity. Cfr.

Franco Pignatti, “Niccolò Franco”, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (Roma: Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 1998), vol. 50, 202-206.

like, some of the most celebrated characters that are now in the city, and of ours chiefly M. Pietro Aretino, a new miracle of nature, and next to him as great an imitator of nature with the chisel as the master of the feats is with his brush, Messer Jacopo Tatti, called il Sansovino, and M. Jacopo Nardi, and I; so that I made the fourth amidst so much wisdom. Here, before the tables were set out, because the sun, in spite of the shade, still made its heat much felt, we spent the time in looking at the lively figures in the excellent pictures, of which the house was full, and in discussing the real beauty and charm of the garden with singular pleasure and not of admiration of all of us. [...] In the meantime came the hour for supper, which was no less beautiful and well arranged than copious and well provided. Besides the most delicate viands and precious wines, there were all those pleasures and amusements that are suited to the season, the guests, and the feast.³⁰

In the circle of his friends and visitors, Aretino clearly was successful in framing his artistic persona as “a new miracle of nature”, not depending on the imitation of reality – as was proper to his friends working with chisels and brushes – but on his capacity to autonomously develop ideas and apply these in debates on all kinds of issues. This very concept of an independent, original and influential arbiter was central to Aretino’s self-fashioning project as it developed over the 1540s. Part of this project was the decoration of his home, seen as expression of his character easily to be perceived by his frequent visitors.

Although we have only little documentation on the interior and decoration of Aretino’s flat in Ca’ Bolani, it is clear from the many references in his correspondence that it grew into a warehouse for the many tributes Aretino received from his extensive network of friends and patrons.³¹ Besides the

³⁰ Letter by Francesco Priscianese to Lodovico Becci and Luigi del Riccio, incorporated in Francesco Priscianese, *De primi principi della lingua romana* (Venezia, 1540); English translation in Joseph Archer Crowe, Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *The Life and Times of Titian* (London, 1877), II, 40-41.

³¹ A comprehensive discussion of these objects is in Lara Sabbadin, *Lusso, vanità e gusto nella casa di Pietro Aretino. Artefici e oggetti di arte applicata documentati nell'epistolario* (MA thesis University

practical gifts to be used in the household – the salads, truffles and the like already mentioned – these often were precious items Aretino could employ in the presentation of his person, both in presence – splendid garments, furs, jewelry – and in absence: medals and portraits.³² On Aretino's interventions in the interior design and decoration we have merely scarce documentation, mainly pertaining to the construction works he felt compelled to commission due to the apartment's poor condition: a new fireplace and the renovation of all floors. The sole exception to this lack of information is the important project executed by Tintoretto in 1544, which eloquently summarizes the self-fashioning strategies Aretino devised for his house. Again it is Aretino himself who informs us on this enterprise, in another of his thank-you notes from February 1545, which arguably indicates that he did not pay for the work done by the young artist in need of publicity.

of Padua, 2006). In her inventory, Sabbadin uses 5 categories: medals, jewels and precious stones, luxury garments, household items in glass and ceramics, and various stationary linked to writing and recreation (music and games). See also her: Lara Sabbadin, *Materiali per lo studio della produzione di beni sontuari documentati nelle opere letterarie di Pietro Aretino e "dintorni"* (PhD thesis University of Padua, 2013). Some analogous cases on which documentary evidence is available are discussed in Isabella Palumbo Fossati Casa, *Intérieurs vénitiens à la Renaissance. Maisons, société et culture* (Paris, 2012).

³² The medals and portraits served as presentation gifts and thus were not meant to remain in the house. The portrait executed by Moretto da Brescia was given to the duke of Urbino (cfr. Aretino's letters dated September 1544, in Procaccioli, *Lettere III*, nn. 36 and 74, 50-51, 97), a portrait by Francesco Salviati went to the French king Francis I (cfr. Aretino's letter to Salviati dated 22 August 1542, in Procaccioli, *Lettere II*, n. 446, 436-437); one of the Titian portraits was donated to duke Cosimo I of Florence (cfr. letter to Gianfrancesco Volterra from July 1546, in Procaccioli, *Lettere IV*, n. 103, p. 82). On these images, see Luba Freedman, *Titian's Portraits Through Aretino's Lens* (University Park, 1995), 35-68.

All the connoisseurs agree that the two fables, that of Apollo and Marsyas and the tale of Mercury and Argus, are beautiful, lively and effortless, as are the attitudes adopted by the figures therein: these you, so young, have painted to my great satisfaction and indeed to everyone else's, for the ceiling of my house, in less time than normally might have been devoted to the mere consideration of the subject.³³

The two large canvases, of which the one with the Apollo and Marsyas scene has survived [ILL 3],³⁴ came to decorate the ceilings of his apartment and thus offered an imposing and indeed dominating

³³ “E belle, e pronte, e vive, in vive, in pronte, e in belle attitudini, da ogni uomo ch'è di perito giudicio sono tenute le due istorie; una in la favola di Apollo e di Marsia, e l'altra in la novella di Argo e Mercurio, da voi così giovane quasi dipinte in meno spazio di tempo che non si mise in pensare al ciò che dovevate dipingere nel palco de la camera che con tanta soddisfazione mia e d'ogniuno, voi m'avete dipinta.” Letter to Tintoretto dated February 1545, in Procaccioli, *Lettere III*, n. 162, 167-168; English translation in Anna Laura Lepschy, *Tintoretto Observed. A Documentary Survey of Critical Reactions from the 16th to the 20th Century* (Ravenna, 1983), 16.

³⁴ Tintoretto, *The Contest between Apollo and Marsyas*, oil on canvas, 139.7 x 240 cm, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT. Inv. 1950.438. On this work, cfr. Robert Echols, “The Contest between Apollo and Marsyas”, in *Tintoretto*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid, 2007), 196-199, containing an extensive overview of the extant bibliography. Additionally see Raymond B. Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr. Sexuality, Satire, and Self-Projection in Sixteenth Century Literature and Art* (Toronto, 2004), 147-151; Robert Echols, Frederick Ilchman, “The Challenge of Tintoretto”, in *Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese. Rivals in Renaissance Venice*, ed. Frederick Ilchman (Boston, 2009), 116-121, Melania Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto & i suoi figli* (Milano, 2009), 94-96, and Frederick Ilchman, *Jacopo Tintoretto in Process: The Making of a Venetian Master, 1540-1560* (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2014), part. 131-133.

iconographic programme of what this writer's house was intended to communicate to its visitors.³⁵ As we may deduce from the extant scene, this programme provocatively underscored Aretino's status as independent yet highly influential man of letters, boldly presented as a critic able and willing to take unconventional positions in artistic disputes.

The Tintoretto canvas presents next to Apollo and Marsyas on the left, who have just finished their competitive musical exhibition, a group of four figures on the right against the background of a mountain positioned in the exact centre of the composition. This doubtless is Mount Parnassus, as the female figure in white is a representation of Minerva holding her feet on a shield showing a satyr's face rendered in distortion.³⁶ The scene therefore combines the myth of Apollo and Marsyas with the intrinsically related tale of Apollo and Pan, another well known narrative on artistic competition often

³⁵ It is not altogether clear in which rooms the canvasses were installed. In his letter to Tintoretto Aretino refers to the "palco de la camera", which suggests one of the smaller rooms that arguably served as office or private drawing and bed room. However, the large proportions of the two canvasses (each one 1.4 x 2.4 meters) make it improbable that they were installed together in one of these smaller rooms. Possibly they separately covered the ceilings of the two smaller rooms that were used as living quarters, or they were installed together in the larger reception room overlooking the Canal Grande which had a more public function. The latter hypothesis is corroborated by the terminology used in Aretino's 1551 goodbye note to the Bolani houselords, where he mentions: "[...]; da parte lo lascio nel tutto, con dire che si guardi la camera, dove mi pensavo di tuttavia godermela, e vedrassi ne le figure del soffittato, ne la politezza del terrazzo, e ne le altre cose del sopra letto e del camino, che anco de le discortesie con la cortesia mi vendico"; Procaccioli, *Lettere VI*, n. 54, 65.

³⁶ The identification of the distorted satyr's face on Minerva's shield was first advanced by Edith Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the Art of the Italian Renaissance. An Inquiry into the Meaning of Images* (Newark, N.J., 1996), 115, and further elaborated by Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr*, 147-151.

intertwined with the Marsyas motif.³⁷ While this explains the presence of Mount Parnassus and Minerva in the Marsyas scene, it challenges our ideas on the other figures to the right, who clearly are not the Muses conventionally presented in this context. Of the three males, the two most to the right of the canvas show their faces in a manner apparently so distinct that they command identification. The older dark-haired man with a beard by now generally is acknowledged as being a portrait of Aretino, whereas the younger and fair-haired man with a beard has attracted various identifications.³⁸ But considering the striking correspondence of both faces with the portraits Enea Vico prepared in these very years for the book of *Medals* conceived by Aretino's assistant Anton Francesco Doni,³⁹ there can be little doubt that this second male figure is a portrait of his closest collaborator Doni [ILL 4].⁴⁰

³⁷ Cfr. Philipp P. Fehl, "Tintoretto's Homage to Titian and Pietro Aretino", in Idem, *Decorum and Wit. The Poetry of Venetian Painting. Essays in the History of the Classical Tradition* (Vienna, 1992), 167-173.

³⁸ Fehl, "Tintoretto's Homage", 169-172, identifies the white-bearded man as Midas, and the man to the far right as an anti-Midas. This interpretation informed Wyss, *The myth of Apollo and Marsyas*, 114-116 and Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr*, 147, 232. Cfr. also Lora Anne Palladino, *Pietro Aretino Orator and Art Theorist* (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1981), 321-332, Echols, "The Contest", 198.

³⁹ Doni's unfinished project and collaboration with the engraver Vico can be situated in the late 1540s; cfr. Wendy Thompson, "Antonfrancesco Doni's *Medaglie*", *Print Quarterly*, 24 (2007): 223-238.

Vico prepared 9 portrait medals, amongst which the ones of Aretino and Doni himself.

⁴⁰ Antonfrancesco Doni (1513-1574) was in contact with Aretino as of March 1543, sending him three letters shortly after collected in his first book of *Lettere* published in Venice in 1544. After a short stay in Venice in late 1543 and early 1544, he went on to central Italy, returning to Venice only in 1549 where he continued to work in close collaboration with Aretino, until between 1554 and 1556 they became fierce enemies and competitors. Tintoretto could have met Doni in the Aretino circle which he frequented as early as Spring 1544, as is documented in his signing a legal document in July 1544 together with Francesco Marcolini, who in these years published the works of both Aretino and Doni; on this document, see Piero Lucchi, "Nuove tessere veneziane per la vita perduta di Francesco

In the large Tintoretto canvas mounted in the ceiling of his apartment Aretino assumes the part of Midas in the Apollo and Pan myth, as the slightly pointed ears of his portrait to the far right underscore. In the context of the artistic contest represented he thus emerges as the only critic able and willing to utter an opinion that goes contrary to convention and tradition, a position well received though by the younger generation represented by Doni as well as, apparently, by Minerva herself. Besides its being an auto-celebrative statement, the canvas thus provocatively underlines Aretino's artistic project to establish himself as a fundamentally different man of letters who takes unconventional positions informed more by his own taste and intuition than by tradition: indeed the "new miracle of nature" acknowledged as such by his friends and guests.

This anti-erudite programme emerges also from another distinctive element characterising Aretino's home: its apparent lack of books. When in 1550 the man who translated many of Aretino's works into French, Jean de Vauzelles, recalled his visit to the writer's house in Venice, he still was puzzled by the fact that the master apparently did not need any books for his literary projects:

[...] that I now imagine finding myself back in M. Pietro Aretino's dwellings in Venice, where his appearance and conversation makes me see a Majesty even larger than suggested in his writings, especially those mentioned above, which brings me to confess (as affirmed by those who have witnessed it) that your presence in no way compromises your name. But above all I was struck with frightful admiration on not seeing in your house any books nor other items except paper, ink and pencils, since I find it very hard to understand that only with such tools you are able to produce such vast Sea of eloquence which derives from it and flows out all over the world, making the origin of the numerous books you have written to those who know you well even more uncertain than the sources of the river Nile. And who would try to reflect on this more profoundly, would need to conclude that unlike this grand river your knowledge

Marcolini", in *Un giardino per le arti. Francesco Marcolino da Forlì, la vita, l'opera, il catalogo*, eds. Paolo Procaccioli, Paolo Temeroli, Vanni Tessei (Bologna, 2009), 92.

does not derive from our base world but from a Divine influence which one cannot acquire by diligent study nor by human instruction.⁴¹

Vauzelles demonstrates himself being a most perceptive observer of the artistic programme developed and provocatively displayed by Aretino: a man of letters who does not depend on “diligent study” or “human instruction” but is a selfmade intellectual who only needs paper and pen to produce his admirable texts. Clearly by 1550 Aretino’s anti-erudite reputation is firmly established, as is the fame of his house being the centre of such an alternative artistic universe. His collaborator Antonfrancesco Doni even refers to the name of his master having become a distinctive brand, applied to all kinds of objects as well as to the neighbourhood Aretino lives in:

On going to Murano, I find there some of the most beautiful cristal vases newly designed and artfully crafted being called Aretino glassware. [...] the house where you have lived for twenty two years has become your property, since people ask to whoever lives there: “where

⁴¹ “[...] che mi par or ora esser in Vinegia nello alloggiamento del Signor Pietro Aretino, dove alla sembianza e al parlar i’ veggo una Maestà più grande che quella riputata ne i suoi scritti sopra tutti quanti soprana, di modo ch’io confesso (come ancora quelli, che l’hanno visto l’affirmano) che la vostra presenza non scema nulla dal vostro nome. Ma sopra tutto mi mette nel spavento dell’ ammirazione a non veder nella Camera vostra libri nissuni, né cosa altra che solo carta, inchiostro e penna, non mi potendo facilmente persuadere, che da questi instrumenti soli potetene cavar un così gran Mar di tante eloquenzie e saper che ne derivano, e si spandono per tutto il mondo, tal che l’origine di tanti vostri libri è a tutti quei che vi conoscono, assai più incerta, che quella del Nilo; e chi ne verrebbe disputare più oltra, bisognarebbe conchiudere il vostro saper non procedere da questo Mondo basso come fa quel gran fiume, anzi d’una Divina influenza, la qual non si pote acquistar né per fatica de studi, né per instruzione umana.” Letter dated 20 November [1550], in Procaccioli, *LSA II*, n. 373, 350-351. On Jean de Vauzelles and his work for Aretino, see the note by Elsa Kammerer in Pietro Aretino, *Trois livres de l’humanité de Jésus-Christ*, ed. Elsa Kammerer (Paris, 2004), 189-208.

do you live?”, “in the Aretino house”, “in the Aretino alley”, “on the Aretino bank”. I sincerely believe there are a thousand boatmen who claim to be an Aretino man. From now on I want to sign all my letters only as the Aretino Doni.⁴²

In accentuating the difference of his literary persona as expressed in his home, Aretino had consistently and successfully pursued an artistic project designed and initiated as of his first establishment in Venice during the late 1520s. Part of this strategy was avoiding or denying some of the benchmarks that contemporary men of letters adopted in their policies of self-representation, notably in their homes. The absence of books in Aretino’s house signaled by De Vauzelles is a clear demonstration of this habit. Less evident is how Aretino’s attitude towards art collecting differed from his peers, who made this a central element in their self-fashioning policies centred on their private dwellings.⁴³ From the comments on a prospective visit to the house of the diplomat and collector Andrea Odoni we know that by 1538 Aretino was well aware and appreciative of such sophisticated collections:

⁴² “Va a Murano, eccoti che mi s’appresenta alcuni bellissimoi vasi di Cristallo, et nuova foggia di vetri lavorati, et si chiamano gli Aretini; queste cose non fanno tanti et sì mirabili scrittori che v’hanno scritto: la casa dove sete stato ventidue anni s’ha acquistato voi per padrone, tanto che si dice a chi vi sta dentro ‘dove abiti tu?’, ‘in casa dell’Aretino’, ‘in calle dell’Aretino’, ‘alla riva dell’Aretino’. Credo veramente ch’egli ci sia mille Barcaruoli, che si dicono essere dell’Aretino. Voglio da hora innanzi sotto scrivermi in tutte le lettere, il Doni dell’Aretino.” Undated letter (but arguably written in 1551), in Anton Francesco Doni, ‘*Contra Aretinum*’, ed. Paolo Procaccioli (Manziana, 1998), 87. Doni’s praise echoes a comment already formulated by Aretino himself in a letter dated May 1545 “A M. Iunio Petreo”; cfr. Procaccioli, *Lettere III*, n. 229, 214-215.

⁴³ See Harald Hendrix, “Italian Humanists at Home: Villas, Libraries, and Collections”, in *Les labyrinthes de l’esprit. Collections et bibliothèques à la Renaissance*, eds. Rosanna Gorriss Camos and Alexandre Vanautgaerden (Genève, 2015), 25-42.

But who wants to see in what ways one's spirit is clear and transparent just needs to look at one's face and dwellings. My advice is to look at these, and you will see how easy it is to observe the serene and beautiful qualities a person has in his dwelling and in his face. If it were not for a little something: I would compare the chambers, the parlour, the loggia, and the garden of the apartment in which you live to a bride who awaits her relatives coming to attend her wedding. So I must do, since it is so well-furnished, tapestried, and splendid. I myself never pay a visit without fear of treading it with my feet, so delicate are its pavements. I'm not aware of any prince having such richly adorned beds, such rare paintings, and such regal decor. Of the sculptures I will not speak: Greece still would have the best of ancient forms had she not let herself be deprived of the relics of her sculptures. [...] be so kind as to let me listen to you at your palace, because hearing it in such lovely accommodations will redouble my joy.⁴⁴

Equally, as we have seen, Aretino was a passionate and acute participant in the debates on art that were hosted in his house and the homes of his friends like Titian, a quality shortly after his death in

⁴⁴ “Ma chi vol vedere in che modo il suo animo è netto e candido, miri di lui la fronte e l'abitazioni; e mirile dico, e vedrà quanto di sereno e di vago si può bramare in una abitazione e in una fronte. Se non che parrebbe un non so che, simigliarei le camere, la sala, la loggia, e il giardino de la stanza che abitate, a una sposa che aspetta il parentado che dee venire a veder darle la mano. E ben debbo io farlo, si è ella forbita, e atapezzita, e splendente. Io per me non ci vengo mai che non tema di calpestarla co i piedi; cotanta è la delicatura dei suoi pavimenti. Né so qual Principe abbi sì ricchi letti, sì rari quadri, e sì reali abigliamenti. De le sculture non parlo, conciosia che la Grecia terrebbe quasi il pregio de la forma antica, se ella non si avesse lasciato privare de le reliquie de le sue sculture. [...] vi degnate che io venga a intendergli nel vostro palazzo, peroché il sentirlo in sì bello alloggiamiento mi duplicarà la letizia.” Letter dated 30 augustus 1538, in Procaccioli, *Lettere II*, n. 79, 81-82. On Odoni's house and Aretino's visit to it, cfr. Monika Schmitter, “Odoni's Façade. The House as Portrait in Renaissance Venice”, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 66 (2007): 294-315, which gives an alternative English translation of the complete letter on p. 308.

1556 recalled in the *Dialogo della pittura intitolato l'Aretino* that Lodovico Dolce inscribed in his name. Yet he did not make his house into a museum as a man like Odoni had done, where – as the 1527 portrait of the collector by Lorenzo Lotto amply shows – books and antiquities had a prominent position.⁴⁵ The art works Aretino collected in or commissioned for his home were predominantly linked to his own person, whether they were to be forwarded to people in his network, like the many portraits of himself, or intended as items decorating his living environment. The large canvases produced by Tintoretto in 1544 celebrated Aretino's status as an influential yet independent critic, and the portrait of his mother that in 1548 he asked Vasari to send from Arezzo clearly related to his private emotions.⁴⁶ Also the few documented works of contemporary artists commissioned by Aretino or donated to him and kept in his rooms seem to be intended primarily for a private and not a public use, as the sculpture of a *Pietà* Tribolo prepared for him in 1537⁴⁷ or the 1547 *Ecce homo* Titian gave to his friend.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ In 1532 the Odoni portrait by Lotto was in the collector's bedroom, as documented in Marcantonio Michiel's survey of contemporary Venetian collections. Aretino most probably saw this remarkable specimen of a collector's image during his visit in 1538, since it remained *in situ* till at least 1555. On the portrait, now in the British Royal Collection, cfr. John Shearman, *The Early Italian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* (Cambridge, 1983), n. 143, 144-148.

⁴⁶ Letter dated December 1548 to Giorgio Vasari, in Procaccioli, *Lettere V*, n. 129, 109. The work was a copy of the image of the Holy Virgin on the San Piero city gate in Arezzo for which Aretino's mother had been the model, as confirmed by Vasari himself in his recollections of what happened on 12 december 1548: "a portrait of the mother of M. Pietro Aretino that was sent to him in Venice" ("un ritratto della madre di Messer Pietro Aretino che selj mandò a Venetia"); see Giorgio Vasari, *Il libro delle ricordanze*, ed. Alessandro Del Vita (Roma, 1938), 62-63.

⁴⁷ Cf. letter dated 29 October 1537 "Al Tribolo scultore", Procaccioli, *Lettere I*, n. 213, 303-304.

⁴⁸ Cf. letter dated January 1548 "A M. Tiziano", Procaccioli, *Lettere IV*, n. 318, 199-200. The work donated to Aretino as a Christmas present was a copy of the canvas handed over to Charles V in

Unlike the residences of some of his peers, amongst whom notably Pietro Bembo, Aretino's home did not attract the attention of his contemporaries because of the art collection it hosted. In his survey on extant art collections in Northern Italy Pietro Michiel, who was a friend of Aretino's and must have known his house,⁴⁹ offered an elaborate overview of Bembo's collection in his Padua residence but ignored the writer's apartment in Ca' Bolani.⁵⁰ Men of letters like Bembo, or Sannazaro before him,⁵¹ had forged their elaborate self-fashioning strategies on elements of sophistication and erudition, gathering in their homes collections comprising antiquities, precious books and manuscripts, fashionable contemporary foreign art mostly from the Low Countries, exotic objects like the Tabula Bembina or exceptionally rich products of local craftsmanship like Sannazaro's Christmas Cradle.⁵²

Augsburg in Spring 1548 (now in the Prado Museum). The Aretino version is identified with the canvas now in the Musée Condé in Chantilly (Inv. PE 32).

⁴⁹ In a letter dated November 1540, Aretino extensively praises Michiel's survey; cfr. Procaccioli, *Lettere III*, n. 406, 354-355. Michiel wrote his *Notizie d'opere di disegno* between 1521 and 1543, without publishing his manuscript, to be published only by J. Morelli in 1800.

⁵⁰ Marcantonio Michiel, *Notizia d'opere di disegno pubblicata e illustrata da D. Jacopo Morelli*, ed. Gustavo Frizzoni (Bologna, 1884), 53-63, on the Bembo collection in Padua. On this collection, see now Davide Gasparotto, "Il mito della collezione", in *Pietro Bembo e l'invenzione del Rinascimento*, eds. Guido Beltramini, Davide Gasparotto, and Adolfo Tura (Venezia, 2013), 48-65; *Pietro Bembo e le arti*, eds. Guido Beltramini, Howard Burns, and Davide Gasparotto (Venezia, [2013]), 373-504; Susan Nalezty, *Pietro Bembo and the Intellectual Pleasures of a Renaissance Writer and Art Collector* (New Haven, 2017).

⁵¹ A contemporary (1524) survey of the Sannazaro collection is in Pietro Summonte's letter on Neapolitan art (collections): Fausto Nicolini, *L'arte napoletana del Rinascimento e la lettera di Pietro Summonte a Marcantonio Michiel* (Napoli, 1925), 157-175.

⁵² Cfr. Hendrix, "Italian Humanists at Home". On the Tabula Bembina / Mensa Isiaca now in the Museo Egizio in Turin (Cat. 7155), cfr. the catalogue entry by Anna Maria Riccomini in *Pietro Bembo e l'invenzione del Rinascimento*, 340-342.

Aretino's home in Ca' Bolani programmatically presented a different picture. It avoided a decoration full of references to a broad variety of cultural domains, that in the case of Sannazaro and Bembo had served as an essential tool in the house's function to facilitate erudite debates. While maintaining the home's capacity as a location of intellectual exchange, Aretino foregrounded instead the present and his own person as exclusive points of reference.

Given the fact that Aretino was well acquainted with museum-like houses as the one arranged by Odoni, his strategy to present his home as an important asset but in a clearly anti-erudite manner very much focused on his own personality denotes a polemical and provocative stance towards conventional men of letters of the generations of Sannazaro and Bembo. This is of course very much in tune with Aretino's overall strategy to present himself as an alternative, profoundly different and new author, whose depending more on 'nature' than on 'culture' had earned him an unprecedented position of autonomy. Yet alongside his desire to establish and maintain such a status of cultural and material independence ran Aretino's ambition to gain what in his generation was considered to be the most prestigious destiny accessible to men of letters: being created a cardinal at a later stage in life, a goal successfully accomplished by Bembo in 1539 at the age of 69. Such a perspective increasingly tinged Aretino's behaviour from the 1540s onwards, and particularly when the election of pope Julius III in 1550 brought a man from the Arezzo region in the position to decide on such matters.⁵³

In these circumstances Aretino decided to swap homes. Invited by the Bolani family to change their prior arrangements and start finally, after twenty or so years, to pay a rent for his apartment, Aretino decided to leave the home he had so much appreciated and take up residence in another building on the Canal Grande, the palace of the Dandolo family in the fashionable district on the Riva del Carbon.⁵⁴ This was an apartment of a very different nature: situated on the best floor of a grand noble palace, it was much larger and better equipped than the dwellings in the Ca' Bolani he left behind [ILL 5]: "Aretino's new flat contained something like twice as many rooms as his old one; its

⁵³ Larivaille, *Pietro Aretino*, 308-356.

⁵⁴ On his departure from the Ca' Bolani, cfr. his letter to the owners from January 1551, in Procaccioli, *Lettere VI*, n. 54, 65. Cfr. also Cairns, "Ancora sulla casa dell'Aretino", and Schulz, "Houses", 86.

ceilings were higher, its *portego* was larger, and it even had an outdoor terrace (*liagò*) at the rear. Aretino was located in a far more venerable building, and at a far more central address [...] He was now living exactly like a Venetian nobleman belonging to a patrician *fraterna*, [...]”.⁵⁵ Situated close to the Venetian palace of the Bembo family, this prestigious new home offered Aretino an appropriate base for his ambition to gain the position of cardinal that Pietro Bembo had held during the 1540s. This encompassed convincing a leading prince – duke Cosimo of Florence – to pay the considerable rent for such a princely residence, but also refraining from turning it into a selfglorifying shrine of an authorship focused on provocative and controversial criticism. This at least is what suggests Aretino’s decision not to move the Tintoretto canvasses with his portrait in the likes of king Midas from the Bolani house to the much more spacious residence in the Palazzo Dandolo.⁵⁶

If during the later years of his life Aretino modified his self-fashioning strategies in order to become more eligible for the much desired office of cardinal, his tacticts were clamourously unsuccessful. Instead, the self-image he had forged during the 1530s and 1540s would turn out to be effective well beyond the days of his life. In this construction, the ‘Aretino-at-home’ part of the self-fashioned image turned out to be particularly significant. When during the nineteenth century artists, authors and scholars started to identify in Aretino one of the most captivating instances of what they considered to be the Italian Renaissance’s ‘modernity’, it was particularly his domestic settings that offered them a privileged framework to imagine this unorthodox creativity much admired because of its boldness. From Ingres’ 1848 scene of *Aretino Receiving the Emperor’s Envoy* to Feuerbach’s monumental 1854 *The Death of Pietro Aretino* [ILL 6],⁵⁷ or from the chapter on Aretino in Jakob Burckhardt’s 1860 *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* to Rudolf von Gottschall’s 1896 novel

⁵⁵ Schulz, “Houses”, 86-87.

⁵⁶ As specified in his good-bye letter to the Bolani brothers from January 1551, cfr. *supra*, note 54.

⁵⁷ Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, *L’Arétin et l’envoyé de Charles Quint*, oil on canvas, 42.5 x 33 cm, 1848, Lyon, Musée des Beaux Arts; Anselm Feuerbach, *Der Tod des Pietro Aretino*, oil on canvas, 267.5 x 176.5 cm, 1854, Kunstmuseum Basel.

Aretino und sein Haus,⁵⁸ they all followed Aretino in interpreting his domestic settings as a mise-en-abyme of the revolutionary new universe he had projected, featuring himself as its epicentre.

⁵⁸ On Gottschall's novel and similar late-nineteenth-century fictionalisations of Aretino, cfr.

Alessandro Luzio's review of the Gottschall novel: Alessandro Luzio, "Aretin und sein Haus", *Die Zeit*, 10, n. 121 (23 January 1897), now in Idem, *Saggi aretiniani*, ed. Paolo Marini (Manziana, 2010), 229-242.